

WASHINGTON, DC – Rep. Mike Honda, chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, issued the following statement upon the adjournment of 110th Congress without passing a bill to restore benefits to the Filipino veterans of World War II.

“I am extremely disappointed with Congress’s failure to right the wrong it perpetrated more than 60 years ago by stripping the Filipino veterans of World War II of the benefits they were promised. Under Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s leadership, this was the closest we have ever come to restoring veterans’ benefits to these men, but a handful of my colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives were unyielding in their opposition to keeping America’s promise.

“In 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt drafted more than 250,000 Filipinos to fight against the Japanese and put them under American military command. They were promised veterans benefits for their sacrifice. They answered the call of duty; they marched along our men during the infamous Bataan Death March; fought a guerrilla war even after Gen. Douglas MacArthur and his forces were forced out of the Philippines, and later helped us in the occupation of Japan.

“No sooner was the war over in 1946, when Congress stripped these men of the benefits promised to them. In this Congress, we came very close to restoring the benefits these men bled for when they fought under the American flag. I was extremely proud of my colleagues in the Senate who passed the ‘Veterans’ Enhancement Act of 2008’ in April with a 96-1 vote, which would have restored benefits to these men. The work and support from Senator Daniel Akaka, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and, Veterans Committee Chairman Bob Filner has been commendable.

“Certain of my colleagues in the House, however, felt otherwise and blocked the Senate bill from moving. This opposition to do what is right disappoints me and angers me.

“We did see progress when Congress appropriated a one-time payment of \$198 million for Filipino veterans in the FY09 Continuing Resolution. I thank my fellow members of the Appropriations Committee who helped fight for this funding. This could not have happened without the commitment of Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey and Rep. Chet Edwards, chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans’ Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. Unfortunately, without the authorization, the funds cannot yet be accessed. In the 111th Congress, these steps, however, will help our advocacy as we re-double our efforts to get full equity to our Filipino veteran heroes.

“The Filipino veterans are patiently waiting. Many are dying, their sacrifice unrecognized. I will not give up, however. With the help of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Akaka, Veterans Committee Chairman Bob Filner and my other colleagues in CAPAC, we will continue to fight in the 111th Congress for a cause that is right.”